

Agriculture appropriations bill being discussed today.

My friends from the Northeast have worked hard to boost prices above market clearing levels by creating a regional compact for their farmers. Now that the compact is implemented and operating, we need a timely, comprehensive economic analysis by the Office of Management and Budget of the marketing and pricing of milk within the six State compact and surrounding areas. The pricing of milk is an extremely complex issue. Artificially manipulating the marketing and pricing of milk will have major impacts on other regions of the United States, like Wisconsin.

Their proposal to raise prices for farmers has worked well and that cost is being passed on to consumers. A recently released study announced that Massachusetts consumers will pay an additional \$25 million for their milk over the next 12 months. The print media has reported that consumers are paying \$.27 a gallon more per gallon of milk in the compact area. We need to analyze the impact this price increase has not only on government purchases of dairy products for lunch programs, but also the impact on low-income families that spend more of their income on food and dairy products.

Although the program only regulates class I milk, other classes will be impacted by the economic signals encouraging Northeast dairy farmers to overproduce. What happens to that excess fluid or manufacturing milk that will be produced in the Northeast and forced to find a new processing plant outside the compact area? Again, the print media has reported that distressed raw milk has moved out of the Northeast to plants in Ohio and as far away as Wisconsin and Minnesota. Ohio plants reportedly were paying \$8.00 per cwt. delivered milk filling all manufacturing plants to capacity in that State. That excess supply of milk added to the overproduction that occurred in the United States further exasperating record low price paid to farms this summer.

Finally, the study should consider a cost/benefit analysis for each State participating in the compact. For example, Massachusetts has only about 300 dairy farms, roughly 10 percent of New England total, while its consumers pay half of the aggregate total consumer costs.

I encourage the Office of Management and Budget to take a serious look at the issue.

RESOURCE CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, the conference report (105-252) on Department of Agriculture appropriations includes \$34.4 million for resource conservation and development [RC&D]. The conferees note that this increase in funding is not specifically earmarked for any initiative but should be used for approved RC&D Councils waiting for funding. I agree that the Natural Resource Conservation Service

[NRCS] should prioritize funding for newly approved RC&D Councils. These councils provide much needed assistance to watersheds and conservation districts seeking to maximize the environmental benefits of their conservation programs. RC&D Councils should be funded. RC&D is a very important program for protection and prudent development of our Nation's natural resource base. Working through local RC&D Councils, this program helps enhance our ability to meet economic objectives within the context of a wise and sustainable use of our natural resources. In Washington State, a State rich in natural resources, RC&D offers the chance to meet the challenges of threatened resources in the face of demands for continued economic development.

Mr. BUMPERS. Mr. President, I agree with the Senator from Washington. The purpose of the RC&D program is to encourage and improve the capability of State and local units of government and local nonprofit organizations in rural areas to plan, develop, and carry out programs for resource conservation and development. The NRCS also helps coordinate available Federal, State, and local programs to ensure adequate protection of natural resources while promoting sound development practices. Funding of the RC&D Councils is an important priority for the NRCS, as correctly emphasized by the conferees, and I urge the NRCS to not overlook opportunities to enhance the efforts of the RC&D Councils in a manner complimentary and consistent with these stated objectives.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I would like to join my colleagues in expressing support for the important work of RC&D Councils as well as opportunities to enhance these efforts. I urge the NRCS to seek avenues that maximize the beneficial conservation and environmental purposes of RC&D activities.

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, as provided by the unanimous-consent agreement taking up this appropriations conference report, there are 20 minutes equally divided available for further discussion of the conference report. I have had some indication that there may be one or two Senators who may wish to comment. Pending their arrival on the floor, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I have been advised by the staff that hotlines have been sent out to Members on both sides, and we have no indication that any other Senator wants to come and speak on the subject of the conference report.

Therefore, I am authorized by the distinguished ranking member to yield back all time remaining on the conference report on both sides of the aisle, and I now so do.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, the conference report is agreed to.

The conference report was agreed to.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that there now be a period for morning business until 6:30 p.m. within which Senators may be permitted to speak for up to 5 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

THE VERY BAD DEBT BOXSCORE

Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, at the close of business yesterday, Tuesday, October 28, 1997, the Federal debt stood at \$5,429,321,910,123.66 (Five trillion, four hundred twenty-nine billion, three hundred twenty-one million, nine hundred ten thousand, one hundred twenty-three dollars and sixty-six cents).

One year ago, October 28, 1996, the Federal debt stood at \$5,233,941,000,000 (Five trillion, two hundred thirty-three billion, nine hundred forty-one million).

Five years ago, October 28, 1992, the Federal debt stood at \$4,065,988,000,000 (Four trillion, sixty-five billion, nine hundred eighty-eight million).

Ten years ago, October 28, 1987, the Federal debt stood at \$2,385,891,000,000 (Two trillion, three hundred eighty-five billion, eight hundred ninety-one million).

Fifteen years ago, October 28, 1982, the Federal debt stood at \$1,142,243,000,000 (One trillion, one hundred forty-two billion, two hundred forty-three million) which reflects a debt increase of more than \$4 trillion—\$4,287,078,910,123.66 (Four trillion, two hundred eighty-seven billion, seventy-eight million, nine hundred ten thousand, one hundred twenty-three dollars and sixty-six cents) during the past 15 years.

NGAWANG CHOEPHEL

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I regret that I must again bring to the Senate's attention the situation of imprisoned Tibetan music and dance scholar, Ngawang Choephel. I had hoped that Chinese authorities would have recognized by now the grave mistake they made in sentencing him to 18 years in prison.

In 1995, Mr. Choephel was in Tibet making a documentary film of traditional Tibetan music and dance when he was detained by Chinese authorities. After being held incommunicado for 15 months without access to his family or independent legal counsel, Mr. Choephel was sentenced to 18 years in